

Whoops! Wrong Ranch

By

Misty Malone

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Chapter One

Landon Traxler, twenty-seven-year-old owner of The Bar T Ranch, steered his four wheeler up to the main barn, where Tucker Jamison, his foreman, and five of his ranch hands were gathered. He wondered why they were there instead of putting their four wheelers up in the machine shed, until he saw Martha, his cook and housekeeper, talking to Tucker. He pulled up beside them, concerned. “Anything wrong?”

Martha nodded. “There’s a young lady here who says it’s imperative that she speak with the owner of this ranch. She won’t tell me why, but when I told her you were out checking fences, she asked if I would call and ask you to come back in, or if she could wait for you. She’s been sitting on the porch swing, waiting, for almost twenty minutes.”

All seven men turned to look at the house, and specifically at the lady on the porch swing. Even with the serious expression on her face, she was very pretty. “Boss, you look awful tired,” Sean said. “You want me to handle this for you?”

Chuckles erupted, but Roy shook his head. “I’ve been here longer, boss. I’m probably more qualified to handle this.”

Now Landon had to chuckle. “And what exactly is it you think she wants that you would be more qualified to handle than Sean?” He handed Roy the keys to his four wheeler. “I think I’ll be able to handle this, but I’ll thank you for putting my four wheeler up, since you’re so willing to help.” He smiled at Roy as he patted him on his shoulder. The other men laughed.

Landon and Martha left the men and went back to the house. He held out his hand as he approached the porch. “Ma’am, I’m Landon Traxler. I apologize, I was out riding fences, and phone reception’s not the best out there. I understand you want to talk to me?”

“Yes, I do. Is there someplace we can go to talk?”

Landon’s eyebrows shot up a bit in surprise, but he nodded his head. “We can go inside to my office if you’d prefer, although I assure you anything you have to tell me you could say in front of Martha.”

Martha was already going into the house, but she had to smile. Landon was protective of the people he cared about, and that was his way of showing that.

“It isn’t that I don’t want anyone hearing this as much as it’s rather involved,” the mystery lady said in explanation.

“Then by all means, let’s go to my office.” He opened the door and directed her in with a hand on her lower back. He directed her to the first door on the right, and closed the door behind them. “I’m sorry, ma’am, would you like some iced tea or lemonade?”

“No, thank you,” she said as she sat in the chair opposite his desk.

He sat down behind his desk and looked over at the petite young lady who was very pretty, with dark hair and the prettiest blue eyes he’d ever seen. She was definitely pretty, but seemed a bit nervous. He had no idea what she wanted to talk to him about. “I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name?”

“I’m Tara Knight.”

“Nice to meet you, Tara. What can I do for you?”

She glared at Landon a few seconds before saying anything, then took a deep breath, and began. “I’d like to know what you think gives you the right to walk over other people.”

Landon sat up straight in his chair. “I’m sorry?”

“You heard me. You’re big and rich and powerful, owning this big ranch. I get that. But is that what you think gives you the right to pay people next to nothing and force them to work long hours, doing whatever the hell you want them to do?”

“Miss Knight, I’m sorry, I think I missed something here. I don’t know what you’re referring to.”

“And I’m sorry, but you should be in jail for trying to force yourself on a female employee.”

Landon was upset now, and stood up, leaning over his desk toward her. “Okay, enough’s enough. I suggest you tell me what you’re talking about, and right now. I’m trying to be patient, but you’re pushing my limits.”

“I’m pushing your limits? What about Abby Wyler’s limits? She’s my best friend. What about her limits? Did you even think about that?” Landon was quiet and stood staring at Tara. “Just as I thought. You never thought of her rights or how that would make her feel. You’re a pig, and people like you should be in jail,” she said with venom in her voice.

After a few moments, Landon shook his head as if trying to clear it. “Who is Abby Wyler?”

“Oh, don’t play dumb with me.”

“Miss Knight, I assure you, I have no idea who Abby Wyler is, and I will further assure you I have never attempted to force myself on a female employee. Now, I suggest you do some explaining.”

“You’re not even taking me seriously,” she snarled.

“Oh, trust me, I am taking you very seriously. And I am seriously upset at the moment, so again, I suggest you do some explaining.”

“Maybe this will get your attention and you’ll take me seriously,” she hissed, as she pulled a gun from her rather large purse and aimed it at him. “Now sit down and listen to me.”

Landon put his hands out, palms up, and sat down. “Okay, easy, Miss Knight. Let’s talk about this and see if we can’t figure it out.”

“Oh, sure, now you’re willing to listen.”

“Like I told you, I listened to everything you said. I wasn’t ignoring you, honest. I just don’t know an Abby Wyler, that I can recall, at least. Maybe you can tell me a little more about her and it will spark my memory.” While he talked, he kept a close eye on Miss Tara Knight and the gun she was holding.

“I think you’re lying. In fact, I hope you are. If you really don’t remember her, you’re worse than I thought.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s only been eight or nine months. If you’ve been able to wipe her from your memory already, you’re no man.”

“Miss Knight, I’m sorry, but my patience is about gone. Hand the gun to me and let’s sit down and talk like adults. If you’ll tell me who Abby Wyler is, maybe I can answer some of your questions.”

She glared at him and raised the gun higher. He noticed her hands were shaking as she held it. In one swift move which had her totally startled, he pushed the gun to the side and out of her hands. He calmly put it in his desk drawer and locked it. He looked up at her, and she was still sitting exactly as she had been, with her hands held up as if she was still holding the gun.

When she saw him look up at her, it seemed to snap her out of her shock. She could easily see the anger in his eyes, and she took off, running for the door. Unfortunately, Landon’s long legs easily covered the area quicker, and he wrapped his left arm around her waist and picked her up. Her legs were still running as he carried her back to his couch.

He sat down and pulled her directly over his lap, with her head at one end of the couch and her legs at the other. She immediately started struggling to get loose and stand up, but he was having none of it. He gave her six sharp swats on her bottom, and she stilled instantly. He took the opportunity to reach underneath her and unfasten her jeans and pull them down with his left hand, while pulling her panties, as cute as he noticed they were, down with the other. Her struggling immediately reappeared.

He tightened his hold on her and started spanking, ignoring all the flailing she was doing in an attempt to get loose. "Now, I don't know who you are, or who Abby Wyler is, but I intend to find out. But in the meantime, we have some talking to do. If you're going to go into someone's home and accuse them of something, tell them what it is you're accusing them of. Like I told you, I'm a pretty patient man, but you're pushing it. If you do that to the wrong person you may just find yourself in a world of hurt."

He paused his speech, but continued the spanking, giving her time to think about his words, before continuing. "And you never, ever," he said with two swats that were harder than any so far, point a gun at someone, even if it is an air soft gun. That's a real good way of getting yourself hurt." He stopped talking again, but continued the spanking, using firm swats that were meant to get his message across to her.

Seeing her gasping, he stopped the spanking for a few moments to let her catch her breath.

She picked that moment, just as he placed his hand on her bare bottom and was about to let her know what he thought of her pulling a gun on him, to find her voice. "Ow! How did you know it was an air soft gun? Damn it, Mr. Whatever you said your name..." She paused.

Her struggling ceased, and she became stiff. As angry as he was with this little lady who was much too cute to be such a pain, he became concerned. She wriggled enough to look over her shoulder at him, tears streaming down her cheeks, but a confused look on her face. As she looked at him, she paled.

"Miss Knight, are you okay?"

"No, I don't think so," she said quietly. "Who did you say you are?"

Now it was his turn to look confused. "I'm Landon Traxler. Who did you think I was?"

"I don't remember the name, but that doesn't sound right. Are you the owner of this ranch?"

"Yes, I am." Something wasn't making a bit of sense. "Who did you think was the owner of this ranch, or why are you looking for the owner?"

"Because the owner of the ranch is the one who tried to force himself on Abby."

"Miss Knight, this isn't making a bit of sense. Why don't you start from the beginning, and let me see if I can figure out what it is you're talking about?"

Her demeanor had changed significantly during this conversation since she turned to look at him. She spoke now in a much quieter, more subdued voice. "I think that might be a good idea. Let me up so we can talk."

"No, ma'am. You can talk right where you're at."

"But I'm already so sore I don't think I'll ever be able to sit again. And I may have..."

When she stopped, he patted her bare bottom. "You may have what, Miss Knight?"

"My name is Tara," she said with a bit of an edge.

"Okay, fine. You may have what, Tara?"

"Would you just let me up so we can figure this out?"

"I repeat, no, ma'am. This spanking's not done yet. I'll let you up when I feel you've learned a lesson, or at least I'm sure you've gotten my message. So far I've seen none of that. So I suggest you start talking so I can figure out what it is you're so upset with me about. Otherwise,

I'll just have to keep going with the spanking until we do get somewhere."

"No, please don't do that," she said with a moan. Her hand that wasn't caught between the two of them flew back to cover her bottom. "I'm so sore now I can't take any more."

"I'm sure you're sore, I'll give you that much, but I'm also sure you can take more. And you will take more unless you can somehow convince me you don't deserve more. So far you've done nothing along that line, so if I were you, I'd start talking."

He gave her a few moments, but when she didn't say anything, he raised his hand. "Okay, we can do it your way."

She quickly stopped him. "No! No, I'm going to talk, I'm trying to figure out what to say."

"I would suggest you start at the beginning, and you tell me nothing but the truth. Who are you and what are you doing here? And who is Abby Wyler?"

She started answering, in between hiccups and sobs. "Abby is my best friend. She got a job here as cook and housekeeper. She said it was okay, although it didn't pay much and it was long hours. But then she said the owner of the ranch, which I assume would be you, tried to force himself on her, so she had to quit. She said she couldn't go to the sheriff because they were good friends, so she just quit. Now I don't know where she is. She isn't answering her phone or anything, and I'm worried about her."

She was crying again now, and Landon was pretty sure it was no longer from the pain of the spanking, which he knew had to hurt. He was more confused now, if that were at all possible. Not only was she not making sense, but he could tell she was tremendously worried about her best friend. She was here out of concern. She may be going about it entirely wrong, but there was something good inside this little lady if she was here, confronting him out of concern for a friend.

He did what seemed only natural to him; he rubbed her back. "Tara, it's obvious you care about Abby Wyler, and I respect you for that. But we have a problem here. I've never heard of her, and furthermore, Martha, the older lady you met, is my cook and housekeeper, and she has been ever since I inherited this ranch from my grandfather two years ago. She was his cook and housekeeper for many years before that, when I was living here with them."

She looked back at him again, obviously confused. "But she said she started here last summer."

"She said she started working at The Bar T Ranch last summer?"

"The Bar T? That doesn't sound right. It had a letter in it, but The Bar T doesn't sound right."

Landon couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Are you telling me you came here, obviously ready and willing to confront a man you've never met and accuse him of trying to rape a young lady, while pointing a gun at him, and you didn't do enough research to make sure you had the right ranch?"

"What do you mean the right ranch? This is where the GPS on my phone brought me. How could it be wrong?"

"Are you sure you put the right address in? Did you check the name of the ranch when you turned into my lane? The name of the ranch is right there in big letters as you turn in." He paused a few seconds. "Do you even know the name of the ranch you're looking for? Or how about the name of the man who supposedly tried to rape your friend? Do you know his name?"

She slumped back down over his knees. "I assumed the GPS would take me to the right place, according to the address. I was so upset when I got here that when I saw it was taking me to a ranch, I assumed it was the right one. I mean, what are the odds that it would take me to a ranch, but it would be the wrong ranch? I forget the man's name, but I assumed since she said it was the

owner, if I ask for the owner, it would be the man I'm looking for."

She was laying over his lap, looking dejected and confused. To her surprise, he started spanking again! "Tara, you're lucky you didn't get yourself killed today. I'm not the man you're looking for, and you should be darn glad I'm not."

"Ow! Stop! I can't take any more. Please, you have to stop!"

"You're wrong today in a lot of ways, young lady. I don't have to stop, and yes, you can take more. But most important of all, you were wrong to do what you did here. If I would have been the man who tried to rape your friend, what do you think would have happened if you would have confronted him with these accusations, and a gun, like you did me?"

He stopped the spanking to give her a few moments to catch her breath and answer, but when she didn't say anything, he started spanking again. "I asked you a question, Tara, and I'd like an answer. What do you think would have happened if you had done this same thing to a man who had tried to rape your friend?"

"Ow! I don't know."

"Yes, you do," Landon insisted, with a couple more good solid swats to her bare bottom. "Think about it a minute." He stopped the spanking again, noting how red her bottom was now, and how hot it felt to the touch. "What do you think he would have done?"

"I honestly don't know," she said in practically a whisper, "but it probably wouldn't have been good. I guess this was a bad idea."

"A bad idea? Do you think?" He forced himself to take a couple deep breaths and calm down. "Tara, have you pointed that gun at anyone else?"

"No."

"Well, at least that's one thing that's good." He took another deep breath, exhaling slowly, and looked down at the little lady draped over his knees. She was laying limp, no longer fighting him. Her bottom was a deep red, and he felt heat coming off of it. He knew it had to be sore, which had certainly been his intent. He was still upset with her, but for some reason, he was upset with her now for a different reason.

Watching her and listening to her, he could now see there was some good in this little lady. But she needed to think before she did things, and she needed someone to watch her and make sure she did that. He had no idea why, but this very pretty little lady was pulling at his heart strings. He hadn't been interested in any lady since he'd inherited the ranch, so this realization was kind of a slap in the face to him. He could deny it all he wanted, but he still knew it was the truth. He'd learned early on that trying to ignore something like that never worked. You're much better looking at it and seeing if there was anything there or not.

With that in mind, he pulled her underwear back up, not surprised when she hissed, then did the same with her jeans. He pulled the little lady up onto his lap, only to have her jump up and run for the door. Again he had to grab her around the waist before she reached the door. He carried her back to the couch with her arms and legs flailing again. He sat down, settling her back on his lap. She hissed and tried to jump up again, but he was ready for her this time and held her down. "But it hurts too much to sit," she complained.

"I'm sure it does hurt to sit, but you will sit anyway," he said in a stern tone that seemed to catch her attention. She stilled, and allowed him to adjust her a bit so she was leaning against his chest, which took much of the weight off her bottom. She started to fight him, trying to pull away from him, but one solid swat on her still sore bottom calmed her. "If you'll stop fighting me long enough, you'll realize that this takes most of your weight off your bottom, and I'm sure that feels better."

She seemed to be testing his theory when she tentatively leaned against his chest. He smiled as she slowly relaxed into him, apparently seeing for herself that he was right. He wrapped his arms around her, partly in an attempt to help her calm and feel safe, but partly to be sure she didn't jump up and run again. He ran his fingers through her hair a few moments. "Take a couple deep breaths, Tara, and calm down."

"How can I calm down after what you just did? I should call the police. No one's ever done that to me, and you had no right."

"Which of those concerns should I address first?" he asked. "When you say no one's ever done that to you, what exactly do you mean? No one's ever cared enough about you to hold you responsible for what you do? Or no one's ever cared enough about you to stop you from doing something that's extremely dangerous?"

"Hell, no. No one's ever beat my ass like that before."

He reached back and gave her bottom one more swat. "Watch your language while we're talking, Tara. I don't like to hear a pretty little lady use such language, especially after I'm trying to help them, even after they've insulted me like you have."

"You're trying to help me?"

"Yes, I am. Luckily for you, I'm not the man you're looking for. But I can see there's a good person inside you, and I'm concerned about that good person. You can't do what you just did without expecting to get hurt. Now, you said you should call the police. Let's get that out of the way first, so we can talk." He took his cell phone out of his pocket and laid it on the couch in front of her. "There's my phone. Go ahead and call the police if you want. I'm sure they'll want to see the gun I have locked in my drawer that you had pointed at me."

She paled again. "I guess I forgot about that."

"I thought maybe you had," he said as he put his phone back in his pocket. "Now that that's out of the way, can we talk?"

"Yes, but I have a question first. You said it was an air soft gun. How did you know that? Everyone always says it looks like a real gun."

"It does if you see it from the side, or from a distance. But when you held it up, pointing it directly at me, I could see that the barrel on that gun is not thick steel like on a regular gun, but rather it actually had two barrels, both of them thin. A true gun needs a much thicker barrel to contain the amount of pressure going through it when it's shot. A simple air soft BB doesn't need nearly as thick a barrel, so they use two thinner ones because of the cost."

"How did you know that?"

"One of my ranch hands has a son that's into air soft. I've gone out shooting with him a few times, and he always shows me if he gets a new gun."

"Oh."

"Now, what made you think Abby worked here?"

"I put the address in my phone, and it brought me here. It was a ranch, so I figured I must have had the address right."

He looked down at her, eyebrows furrowed together. "What do you mean you figured you had the right address?"

"I know I have it all but the last number. I was pretty sure I had it right, too, but I figured these are ranches out here. What are the chances of two ranches having almost the same address?"

"You said The Bar T doesn't sound like the name of the ranch she worked at?"

"No, it doesn't, now that I think about it. I'm sure it had a letter in it, though."

"And Landon Traxler doesn't sound like the name of the owner?"

She tried to hide her face in his chest as she whispered, “No, not really, I guess.”

“Unbelievable. Do you care at all about your own safety?”

“Of course I do,” she said, a bit incensed.

“You sure don’t act it. If The Bar T doesn’t sound right, what about The Circle G?”

Her head instantly raised, and she met his eyes. “I think that was it,” she admitted.

“How about the name Craig Garrison?”

Her face flushed. “Um, again, that sounds familiar. Who is it?”

“Craig Garrison owns The Circle G Ranch. His lane is across the road from mine, right over the little hill. Our address is the same as his except for the last number.”

“Oh.”

“Is that all you have to say?”

“Whoops! I guess I have the wrong ranch.” She was quiet for several long moments, but to his surprise, she looked up and waited until she caught his eyes to say, “I’m sorry, Mr. Traxler.”

“If you want me to call you Tara, you’ll have to call me Landon.”

“I’m sorry, Landon. I guess I need to go talk to him.”

“I would suggest you find a better way to approach him if you do.”

“Why?”

“Because Craig has been looking for a cook and housekeeper since last summer, but with the exception of an older lady who worked for him last November for about three weeks, he hasn’t had anyone.”

“Are you sure?”

“Craig and I are good friends. He’s a year older than me, and I met him when I was small and stayed here with my grandparents during the summer. He lived across the road with his parents, so we used to do stuff together. I moved here after I graduated from college, and he was running the family ranch over there at the time. His father died and he inherited that ranch about a year before my grandfather died and I inherited this ranch.”

She squinted her eyes as she looked at him. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am. I know he’s been looking, but he’s having a hard time finding someone who’s willing to be up early enough to have breakfast ready for him, and is willing to work six days a week.”

“And he hasn’t had anyone this whole time?”

“He has a lady who comes in once a week and does his laundry and cleans his house, but he’s been eating with the men at the bunkhouse for his meals.”

“Maybe that’s not the right ranch, either.”

“Maybe not. Maybe you need to research your ranches before you go insult someone else.”